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人学生の岩井は、ある日、菌類学者の助手のバイトを紹介される
訪れた先で待っていたのは、宰田という気難しそうな男だった
最初は不安を感じていた岩井たったが、
室田の教えてくれる未知の世界に触れたり、
生活能力のない宰田の世話を焼いたりする毎日…
そんな時間の中、岩井は次第に室田にいとおしさを

爪先に光路図
青井秋

ミリオンコミックス
HertZ Series Number 128
大洋図書

comment

aki aoi

初単行本です。

少しでも楽しんでいただけたら幸いです

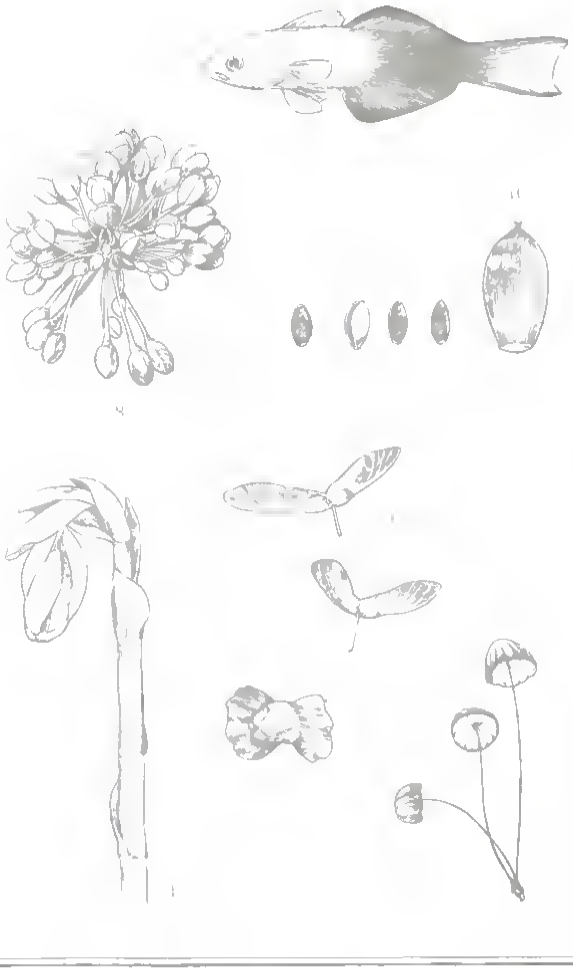
COVER DESIGN Plumage Design Office

青井 秋の本

HertZ Series
爪先に光路図

HertZ［ハーツ］

HertZは
偶数月発売予定



爪先に光路図

presented by

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu

Part One

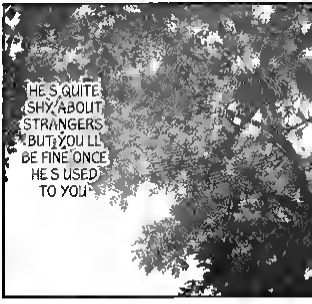
YES.
I THINK YOU'LL LIKE THE JOB.
LUCKILY, THIS FRIEND OF MINE NEEDS ONE

RESEARCH ASSISTANT? ME?

THANK YOU!

I'M SURE THE PAY WILL BE BETTER THAN THAT OF YOUR CURRENT JOB
I KNOW YOU'RE A HARD WORKER. DOESN'T A JOB RELATED TO YOUR STUDIES SEEM PERFECT?

Even so...


HE'S QUITE SHY ABOUT STRANGERS, BUT YOU'LL BE FINE ONCE HE'S USED TO YOU.

I don't have any experience, plus this is out of my specialty. I don't think I'll be of much help

So, I'll have to climb these stairs all the time?
That'll be tough...

Guess this is the place.

Voice
...
IWAI ARATA?
Y-
YES!
I CAME ON PROFESSOR SHINOHARA'S RECOMMENDATION.
Start
H-he startled me!

he seems hard to approach...
S-somehow,
I'M MUROTA.
COME ON IN.
OH, OKAY.
JUST TAKE A SEAT ANYWHERE YOU LIKE
UMM...

YOU ARE NOT SPECIALIZED IN MYCOLOGY?
OH, NO...

UMM, PROFESSOR SHINOHARA GAVE ME THE BASIC OUTLINE OF THE JOB, BUT MAY I ASK ABOUT IT IN DETAIL?
BUT CAN I ASK ABOUT IT IN DETAIL?

CARE FOR SOME COFFEE?

I NEED YOU TO SORT SPECIMENS AND DO SOME FIELD WORK

HUH?
LET'S GO

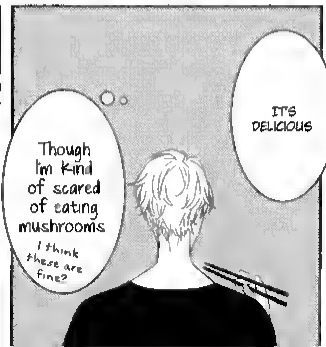
IT'LL BE EASIER IF I SHOW YOU THE WORK, RATHER THAN MERELY EXPLAIN IT.
PROFESSOR MUROTA...
JUST MUROTA WILL BE FINE
A-ALL RIGHT...
SO, MR MUROTA, DO YOU SPECIALISE IN MYCOLOGY?
YEAH
THE RANGE OF SPECIMENS HERE
THE ENVIRONMENT IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF MY RESEARCH.
TAKE PHOTOS AND NOTES.
SO WHAT SHOULD I DO?
O-OKAY

pant
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I'M FINE
Thank you
AMAZING.
WE GATHERED SO MANY DIFFERENT SPECIMENS
including mineral stones, too
FOR EXAMPLE, THESE FUNGI, THERE ARE SO MANY
OH, THAT'S FOR FOOD SUPPLIES
They're wild enoki mushrooms
HUH?
THEY TASTE GOOD
REALLY?
..

HUH?
DON'T FORCE YOURSELF
MOST OF MY PREVIOUS ASSISTANTS QUIT BECAUSE THEY CLAIMED THEY COULDN'T KEEP UP WITH THE WORKLOAD
SO, I DON'T WANT YOU TO FORCE YOURSELF
I GET TO EXPERIENCE THINGS HERE THAT I'D NEVER KNOWN ABOUT BEFORE
IT'S REALLY EXCITING
GUESS I'LL JUST HAVE TO WORK ON MY STAMINA THEN

I SEE...

RIIING
stare——
So, a real enoki is like this, huh?


Though I'm kind of scared of eating mushrooms
I think these are fine?
IT'S DELICIOUS

YES
YES, I KNOW
THE SEMINAR IS STILL A PROBLEM...
YES.
YES? PROFESSOR SHINOHARA?
YES I MANAGED, SOMEHOW...
MY JOB S QUITE SIMPLE, ACTUALLY I ENJOY IT
BUT HE ISN'T ALL THAT BAD
WELL, HE'S KIND OF DIFFICULT TO APPROACH, YES
DOOR CLICK
!
HELLO?
The door isn't locked
MR MUROTA?

MR. MUROTA?!

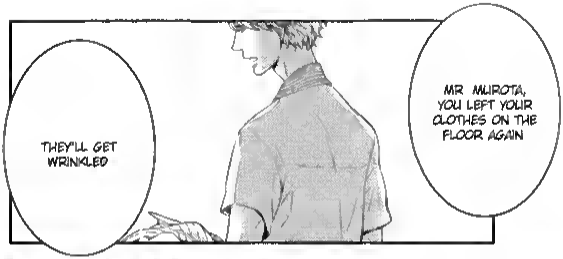
SHEESH!
YOU SCARED THE HELL OUT OF ME!

THEN, HAVE YOU BEEN EATING REGULARLY?

WHY WERE YOU SLEEPING ON THE FLOOR ANYWAY?
OH I GUESS I WAS SO FOCUSED ON WORK THAT I FORGOT TO SLEEP

YES, I HAVE
...

OH, I'M SURE IT WON'T AFFECT MY WORK
UMM, IF YOU'RE FINE WITH A SIMPLE MEAL, I CAN COOK
BECAUSE YOU'LL DEFINITELY GET SICK IN NO TIME IF YOU'RE LEFT LIKE THIS
WHY?
BUT OF COURSE, YOU CAN ALSO FORGET ABOUT ALL OF THIS IF YOU SO WISH
N-NO...
PLEASE DO
OKAY!


MR. MUROTA, YOU LEFT YOUR CLOTHES ON THE FLOOR AGAIN
THEY'LL GET WRINKLED

I FORGOT.
SHEESH

IWAI, ARE YOU HERE?
YES?

I HAVE TO GO TO THE LAB TODAY

SORRY, CAN YOU CONTINUE THE WORK BY YOURSELF?

AH...
YES, SURE
BE CAREFUL ON YOUR WAY THERE

What a surprise!
Whod have thought hed clean up so nicely?
And...

I SHOULD BE BACK BEFORE SEVEN
IWA?

He's looking after such a gorgeous greenhouse,
But why can't he take better care of himself?
He usually isn't a very talkative person.
WHAT A WEIRD MAN
But while we were working, he talked a lot
About a mysterious world

which slowly captivated me
WHAT ABOUT OUR FIELD WORK?
LET'S GET THAT DONE BEFORE IT STARTS RAINING.
IT'LL BE RAINING SOON.

OH...
UMM. THIS IS CLAVULINOPSIS FLISIFORMIS FROM THE CLAVARIACEAE FAMILY
I WAS THINKING OF TAKING THE SPERMATOPHYTE CLASS NEXT YEAR.
AFTER SEEING ALL OF THESE THOUGH, I THINK I HAVE TO RECONSIDER
YES,
I SEE YOU REMEMBERED
SEEING THIS EVERY DAY I THINK I'VE BEEN ENCHANTED BY IT
I'M NO GOOD, AM I? CONSTANTLY CHANGING MY MIND LIKE THAT...

I CHANGE MY MIND EASILY AND IN THE END I LEAVE EVERYTHING UNFINISHED
IN A FOREST LIKE THIS YOU GET TO SEE INSECTS, PLANTS, BIRDS
EVERY SINGLE ONE OF WHICH SPARKING HUMAN CURIOSITY
WHICH IS JUST NATURAL, BECAUSE LIFE IS INTERCONNECTED
IWA! DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S THE WORLD'S LARGEST ORGANISM?
HUH? ISN'T IT THE BLUE WHALE?
WRONG. THE LATEST STUDIES SAY THAT IT'S A MUSHROOM.
HUH?

IT SEEMS THAT THERE'S A FUNGUS SIMILAR TO THIS HONEY FUNGUS, WHOSE COLONY COULD FILL UP AN ENTIRE MOUNTAIN IN AMERICA.
AND THE VISIBLE PARTS ARE REALLY JUST A SMALL FRACTION OF ITS TRUE FORM THAT'S BURIED UNDERGROUND
OH...
ANY KNOWLEDGE WE ACQUIRE ABOUT A LIVING BEING
USUALLY ONLY CONCERNS THE EXTERNAL PORTION OF ITS LIFE
THE SAME APPLIES TO ACADEMIC STUDIES
THE NATURAL SCIENCES HAVE BEEN PROLIFERATED AND DISSOLVED.
BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT THEIR SPIRIT'S COMPLETELY GONE
ALL LEARNING IS INTERRELATED
IT'S GOOD TO DEVELOP CURIOSITY FOR EVERYTHING AROUND YOU.
BUT OF COURSE, THE PORTION THAT'S NOT VISIBLE IS NO LESS IMPORTANT.

But,
OKAY!
AH—
RIGHT! WE'RE FINISHED HERE
unique
He's really

very—
He's very,

PATTER
WHOA!
IT'S RAINING!

IT'LL BE RAINING SOON
WE'LL WRAP UP FOR TODAY

OH!

rustle
OH WELL, NEWSPAPER IT IS—

WHAT'S WRONG?
AH, I FORGOT MY RAINCOAT

THAT'S A SURPRISE
HUH?
EVEN YOU CAN MAKE MISTAKES LIKE THAT, HUH?

W-WELL, I'M
YOU SEEM SO STRONG AND RELIABLE; IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT YOU'RE SEVENTEEN YEARS YOUNGER THAN ME

THAT'S ALL RIGHT.
I'LL BE THE ONE IN TROUBLE IF YOU GET SICK.

THANK YOU, BUT PLEASE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO
I'M FINE, REALLY

YOU KNOW I'M NOT GOOD AT GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE
YOU'VE BEEN OF SO MUCH HELP TO ME...
BUT I—

THAT YOU'RE MY ASSISTANT...
I'M GLAD

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 01
Ao1 Aki

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Echochi scans

http://echoch.pu e.de/

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu

Part Two

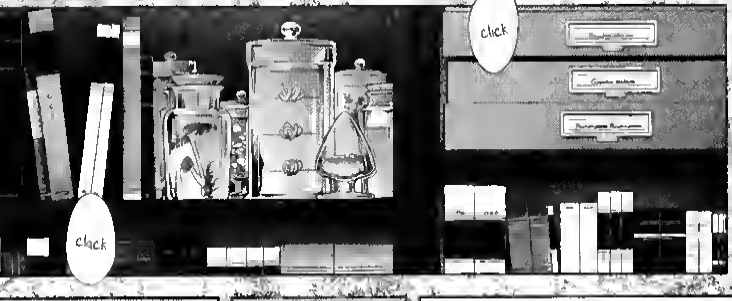
IWAI,
I'M GOING TO CAMPUS FOR A WHILE

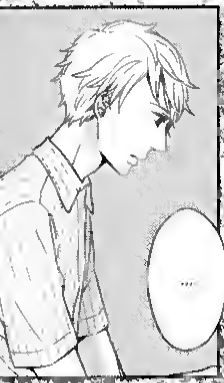
OKAY.
TAKE CARE

!
I'VE COPIED THE TAGGED PAGES FOR YOU

SHOOT'
I FORGOT ABOUT YESTERDAY'S DATA

THANK YOU.


click
click


...

I'M NOT GOOD AT GETTING ALONG WITH PEOPLE.
click

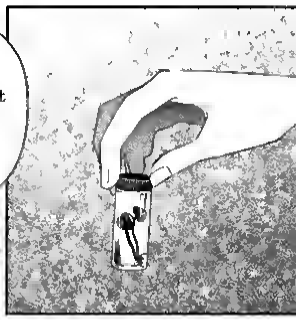
click
click

creak
Still,
it's so quiet here.
STRETCH

I'M GLAD THAT YOU'RE MY ASSISTANT.

Mr. Murota's always working here, all alone

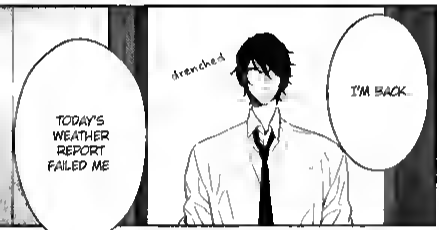
But,
It doesn't have to be me,
he'd still be fine with anyone else



I'm happy he said that.

WELCOME BACK—
HUH?

clank


drenched
I'M BACK.
TODAY'S WEATHER REPORT FAILED ME

I—
I'LL BRING YOU A TOWEL!
SORRY ABOUT THAT.

OH
I'M STILL ORGANIZING THAT PART OF THE BOOK-SHELF
I'LL BREW SOME COFFEE
IN THE MEANTIME TAKE A HOT SHOWER TO WARM UP
ruffle
I CAN FIND EVERYTHING EASILY NOW IT SAVES ME A LOT OF TIME
DON'T WORRY
I SEE YOU PUT ALL OF THEM IN ORDER.
During the months I've been here,
I realised that Mr. Murota's surprisingly touchy-feely
O-OKAY
I'LL TAKE THAT SHOWER NOW

Somehow,
it feels like a wild wolf's getting attached to me.
I'm sure
he's just treating me as a kid, though.
IWAI.
WELL,
HEY, HOW'S IT GOING WITH YOUR PART-TIME JOB?
I ENJOY WORKING WITH HIM
MR. MUROTA'S KIND TO ME
PROFESSOR SHINOHARA.
HELLO

HE SEEMS TO LIKE YOU A LOT. IT'S RARE FOR HIM TO CARE SO MUCH ABOUT SOMEONE.
REALLY?
OH?
YOU'RE THE FIRST TO WORK WITH HIM FOR SUCH A LONG PERIOD.
OH, THAT'S GREAT!
...
HUH, MR. MUROTA?
WE HAVE A VAST COLLECTION OF BOOKS OF HIS FIELD AT OUR LIBRARY.
SO HE'S HERE OFTEN.
I SEE...
OH.
SPEAK OF THE DEVIL.

HE'S SO PRIM AND PROPER WHENEVER HE'S OUT. WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS BEEN CRAZY ABOUT HIM SINCE LONG AGO.
?
BUT HE HASN'T REALLY CHANGED AT ALL.
I-I SEE...
BUT HE TURNED THEM DOWN BECAUSE HE THINKS SUCH MOTIVE WILL HINDER HIS RESEARCH
THERE WERE QUITE A LOT OF FEMALE APPLICANTS APPLYING TO BE HIS ASSISTANT
OH!
HUH?
IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, THIS SAMPLE ISN'T TAKEN FROM THE SPECIFIED LOCATION?
IWA!?

YOU CAN GO AFTER YOU'RE DONE WITH THIS.
O-OKAY
I-I'M SORRY I MUST HAVE SKIPPED A COLUMN
IT'S SO UNLIKE YOU TO MAKE SUCH A MISTAKE.
I LEFT THAT DOCUMENT ON THE TABLE
OKAY
THANK...
...YOU.
sigh

After all
that was the very reason he hired me.
Right, it has absolutely
nothing to do with me.
to know more about him, merely a hindrance to him?
Is my desire to see that smile,
It'll be fine,
as long as I do my job without disrupting his research.

But I've finally
found you.
Stretching my fingertips,
like a sea of hyphae hidden beneath the earth thirsting for rain,

he was there before I even realised it myself.
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
BEEP
jolt

WHAT AM I
BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP
...
Iwai?
...
MR. MUROTA?!
OH!
THE PHONE—
BEEP
YES HELLO?
I'M SORRY
WERE YOU SLEEPING?
N-No
Ummm
did something happen?

CAN YOU COME OUT FOR A WHILE?
IF YOU FEEL LIKE IT, I MEAN?
THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO SHOW YOU.
MR. MUROTA!
HELLO.
I'M SORRY FOR CALLING YOU OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.
IT'S OKAY.
THIS PLACE WE'RE GOING TO, IS IT FAR?
NO, JUST ABOUT AN HOUR'S DRIVE AWAY.
MY FRIEND FOUND IT YESTERDAY AND TOLD ME ABOUT IT.

I REMEMBER YOU SAID YOU WANTED TO SEE IT
I'M GLAD WE FOUND IT IN TIME.
T-THANK YOU.
WE NEED TO WALK A BIT FROM WHERE WE ARE
WOW!

AMAZING!
AS A RULE OF THUMB... LEARNING ABOUT STARS
HELPS A LOT WHEN YOU'RE WALKING IN [redacted] WOODS AT NIGHT
YOU KNOW ABOUT STARS, TOO?
THE SUMMER CONSTELLATIONS ARE KIND OF HARD TO SEE
?
IT'S NOTHING.
COME THIS WAY.
HAHA.
AMAZING...

IT'S DARK HERE, SO WATCH YOUR STEPS.
ween ween
Lots of sounds here
...
chir chir
chir!
As if
we're on a completely different planet.

Mr. Murota and me.
Just the two of us.
Argh!
I really can't do this.
No matter what I want to believe...
IWAI, TURN OFF YOUR FLASHLIGHT.

I FOUND IT.
This is love.

I'VE NEVER SEEN A COLONY AS BIG AS THIS.
YOU'RE LUCKY.
THANK GOODNESS.
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO SHOW YOU THIS.
WELL...
YOU SEEMED A BIT OFF LATELY.
I'M WORRIED THAT YOU'RE DISSATISFIED WITH THE JOB OR SOMETHING.
NO, THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL.
...
IT'S PRETTY FUN EVERYDAY.

I'M SORRY.
IW-H?
R-REALLY?
THAT'S GREAT THEN...
I...
I LIKE YOU.
MR. MUROTA
SEEMED EXTREMELY SHOCKED.
...

Then, with furrows between his eyebrows, he fell silent.
On our way back, we absent-mindedly listened to the radio that broke the silence in the car
I racked my brains to come up with what I should say to him
Apologize? Express my gratitude? Give an explanation? None of them felt appropriate enough
HUH?
IWA!?

And the night ended

before I could even find the words I was looking for

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 02
Aoi Aki

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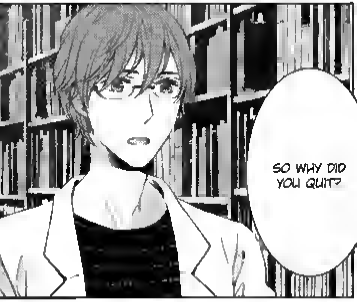
Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Part Three

ARATA, ARE YOU USING THE MICROSCOPE OVER THERE?
HUH? YES.
DO YOU NEED IT?
OH, IT'S BECAUSE I RECENTLY TOOK A LOT OF FUNGAL SAMPLES.
NO. NOT REALLY.
WHOA! THAT'S SOME PECULIAR THING YOU'RE LOOKING AT
FOR YOUR PART TIME JOB, RIGHT?
WHY DID YOU RESIGN ANYWAY?
THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY OF BEING A RESEARCH ASSISTANT MIGHT NOT COME TWICE, Y'KNOW? TOO BAD YOU QUIT.
WELL,

NO, NOT AT ALL

THE ECCENTRICITY OF THE PROFESSOR BEING ONE OF THEM?
THINGS HAPPENED YOU SEE


SO WHY DID YOU QUIT?

REALLY?
THE PROFESSOR'S REALLY KIND AND CARING

BECAUSE I'M NO LONGER FIT FOR THE JOB

EXCUSE ME

NONE AT ALL. SHOULD I JUST LEAVE THEM HERE?
YES, THANK YOU

THANKS SORRY FOR THE TROUBLE
PROFESSOR SHINOHARA, HERE ARE THE COPIES

A-AH

...
IT'S BEEN TWO MONTHS SINCE YOU QUIT YOUR JOB AT MUROTA'S.

IT JUST... HE HASN'T LOOKED FOR ANY OTHER ASSISTANTS EVER SINCE THEN
NO NO! IT'S ALL RIGHT.
YEAH, I'VE CAUSED YOU SO MUCH TROUBLE TOO...
HUH?
BUT,
ISN'T IT TOO MUCH WORK WITHOUT AN ASSISTANT?
EVERY TIME I ASK IF HE'S IN DIRE NEED OF HELP, HE KEEPS INSISTING THAT HE DOESN'T NEED ANY

HE LIKES YOU A LOT, IT SEEMS.
WELL, I'M SURE HE'LL SAY SOMETHING WHEN THINGS BECOME UNBEARABLE FOR HIM.
If only that were the case.
"HE LIKES YOU A LOT"
I've brought him nothing but trouble
he's hesitant to take in an other assistan exactly because of me
I'm sure the truth is

I wonder if the green house's being taken care of?
Emotions embedded in the roots of my existence had spread deeper than I had expected,
slipping through my fingers like an organism of its own

sprout everywhere

Things I've seen with my eyes, touched with my hands

they bear fruit every day

And with a few discoveries here, a few losses there

Truth is, I was willing to do anything for you
But, just by being by your side, I've brought you enough trouble
creeping into me as if I were infected by germs.
I became lost
in an endless labyrinth beneath the earth.
OUPS!
FLUTTER
Argh!
he wanted to see-
This sample, it's the one
Jolt

...
SHIT,
I FORGOT TO WATER THE PLANTS.
CLATTER
Splash
THUD
chirp chirp chirp
chirp chirp chirp

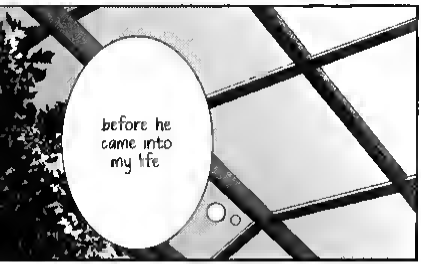
...
sigh

...
oh

IWAI,
THE BUTTERFLY'S—

Im just becoming the way I used to be

Its been two months.


before he came into my life

Was it always this quiet

before he came here, too?

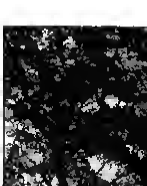
I can barely remember anymore

Last I stepped foot on that mountain
was two months ago
SORRY ABOUT THAT, THANKS FOR HELPING OUT!
YOU'RE USING THEM FOR GROUP WORK, RIGHT? I'LL GET THEM FOR YOU
pant
I don't remember walking through the woods even being this hard
STEP
Since when
pant
have I started feeling guilty of pushing my way through these bushes?

The chirps of birds, the buzzes of insects,

even the veins of the leaves.

Mr Murota taught me each and every of their names.



By giving them names, we ack-nowledge their existence.

If I hadn't given him my name

would I have stayed by his side a little longer?

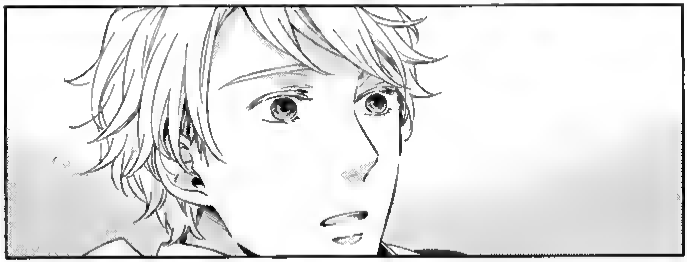
Whoosh
WHOA!
Constantly thinking of matters I've never through of before in an endless circle.
No
But.
Thud
OH!
OW-
O-OUCH...
Or what Mr Murota taught me anyway.
It's the Pteris Multifidas nutritious leaves

sigh
...
buzz
buzz
Tweet
chirp
chirp
chirp
hum
hum
The sound of nature...
rustle

I'm sure
that there's a huge mass of mycelium spreading down below
Sometimes, they come up to the surface to remind us that they are here
And before you know it, they vanish as if they were washed away by the rain
Just how many times
do I have to repeat–

HEY!
ARE YOU—

IWA!?



I WAS
ASKED TO TAKE SOME SEED SAMPLES—

O-OH!
UOH

NO! I WAS KIND OF TIRED, SO I WAS LYING DOWN A BIT.
ARE YOU HURT?
WELL THEN, I'LL BE GOING NOW—
REALLY? THANK GOODNESS.
IWA!!

WAIT!
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT IT
EVER SINCE THAT DAY
...
IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE.
PLEASE FORGET IT

I REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE
BUT—
SAID THAT IN THE FIRST PLACE
...
I WANT YOU TO COME BACK

I'M SURE YOU'LL BE TOO WARY OF ME
AND I'LL CAUSE YOU NOTHING BUT TROUBLE ANYWAY
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE
YOU'RE WRONG!
IWAI, I—
I DIDN'T WANT THAT, THAT'S WHY I RESIGNED
IT DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE
THAT'S HOW KIND YOU ARE

THANK YOU VERY MUCH
GOOD BYE

WAIT.
YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG.

I THINK ABOUT YOU ALL THE TIME.
I WANT TO TELL YOU EVERYTHING I SEE.
I HAVEN'T BEEN DOING ANYTHING RIGHT
EVER SINCE YOU LEFT ME.
I CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU

LOVING YOU?

IS IT ALL RIGHT
IF I KEEP ON

YEAH
BECAUSE I LOVE YOU, TOO

creak
WELCOME HOME
I'M BACK

LOOK AT THIS.
?
COME HERE.
YEAH.
BEAUTIFUL, ISN'T IT?
THIS ONE HERE IS ABOUT TO BLOOM
IT'S BUDDING
I FOUND IT WHEN I WATERED THE GREEN HOUSE THIS MORNING.
OH, YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S UNUSUAL FOR THEM TO GROW HERE
AND LOOK! THIS IS AMANITA HEMIBAPHA!

SO I WAS WAITING FOR YOUR RETURN
I WANTED TO SHOW THEM TO YOU IMMEDIATELY
?

MR—
MR MUROTA?
I'M GLAD YOU'RE BACK
WELL,
IT'S JUST
I'M SO HAPPY YOU'RE HERE

end

120

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 03
Ao1 Aki

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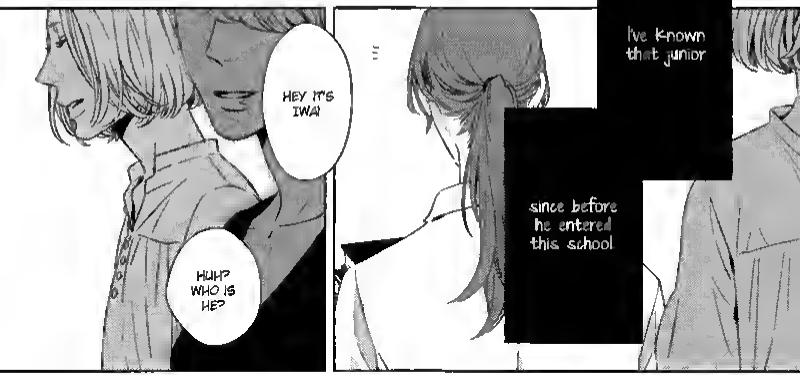
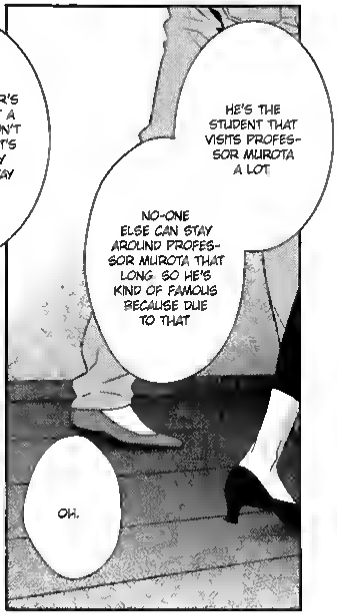
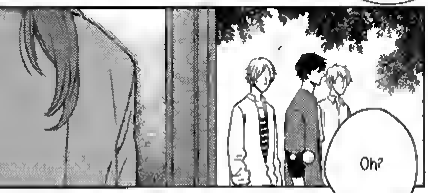

HEY IT'S IWAI
HUH? WHO IS HE?
I've known that junior
since before he entered this school

I couldn't agree more
THAT PROFESSOR'S HANDSOME BUT A LITTLE SCARY, DON'T YOU THINK? THAT'S PROBABLY WHY NO-ONE CAN STAY AROUND HIM FOR LONG


HE'S THE STUDENT THAT VISITS PROFESSOR MUROTA A LOT
NO-ONE ELSE CAN STAY AROUND PROFESSOR MUROTA THAT LONG SO HE'S KIND OF FAMOUS BECAUSE DUE TO THAT
OH.

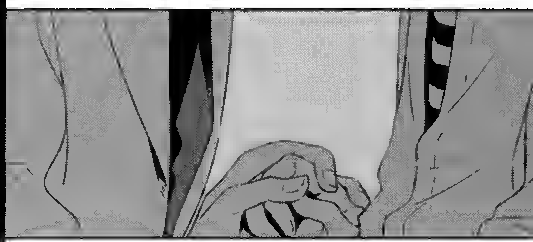

Oh?

He's gentle and a bit unpredictable at times.
HELLO.
I'LL CARRY THAT FOR YOU. YOU'RE GOING TO THE LAB, AREN'T YOU?
THANK YOU!
My first impression of him was that he's perfect.
PROFESSOR SHINOHARA'S AT A MEETING RIGHT NOW, RIGHT?
About two months ago, I was asked to run some errands at Professor Murotas research lab
That was when I found out just how passionate he is.

silence
Isn't anyone here?
dong dong
Why do I have to do this for Professor Shinohara?
Professor Murotas Kind of antisocial Its hard to get along with him
OH

I was here!
Thank-goodness...

Ever since I saw them together, I've been feeling a sharp, constant pain in my chest.



It was over before I even knew it.

That was all that'd been left of my feelings for him. So, maybe

HUH?

end

40
nt

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 04
Ao1 Ak1

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Cleaner monstabot
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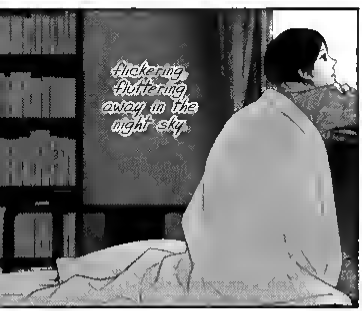
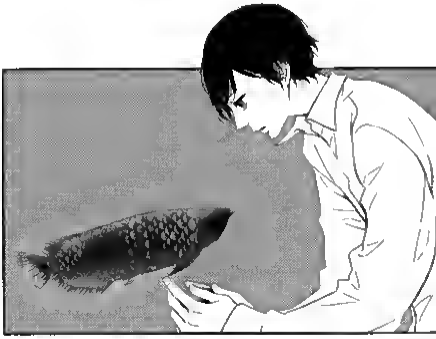
A Fish's Warmth



Those colourful fishes will, sometimes, leave trails of scales similar to sequins,

The fishes swim out of their masters' bodies when they fall asleep, and go back when they awaken.

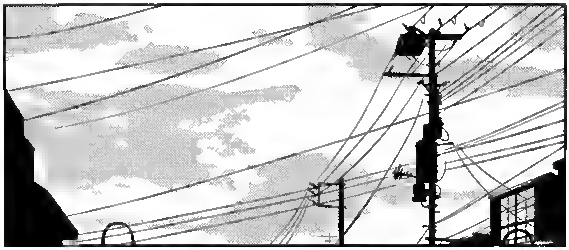


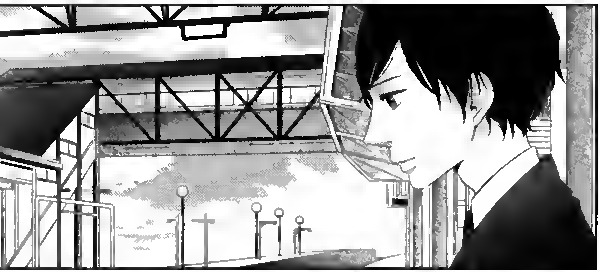
Children are fond of keeping secrets.

For some reason, no one else can see them.

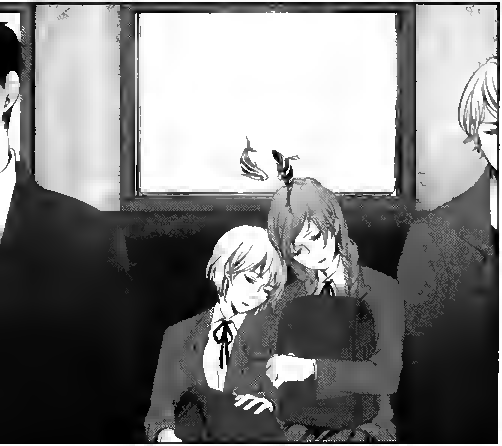
The deeper one's secret is, the more solitary he becomes.

A secret





will always remain a secret



!
They must be very close

MORNING.
HIROTAKA.
Good morning
SEIJI, WE'RE GETTING OFF AT THE NEXT STOP.
SEIJI!
MORNIN'.
MORNING

Is that his friend from the club?
HIRO!
HEY!
WHY DID YOU LEAVE WITHOUT ME?
...
UMM,
I THOUGHT YOU WERE BUSY

WHOA!
YOU JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND
I didn't want to be a bother
It's not like it'd make any difference if I stayed back
What are you two doing?
Morning
You're heavy!

When students doze off during afternoon classes, it becomes like a gigantic fish tank

I'm not good at making friends

Yet, strangely, I like this place called 'school'

Theyre so pretty

Its a shame no one else can see them

Seiji's asleep again.
Slip
Oh

A translucent, milk-y white fish, with hints of silver.
yun
poke
Sometimes a blue light emanates from its body
And when its exposed to daylight, it becomes pure white
Seiji's fish
is the most beautiful of them all

flutter

I'LL LEAVE THE REST TO YOU
SURE

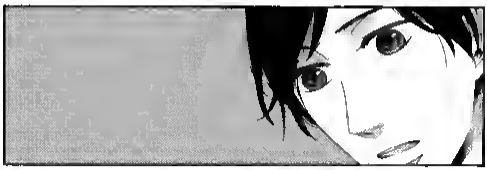
...

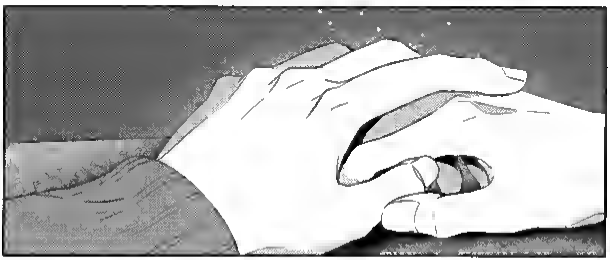
He'll sleep anywhere at any time of day, huh?
Looks like it likes me.
Slip
YOU ARE
TOO KIND

I KNOW YOU'RE SIMPLY CONCERNED ABOUT LEAVING ME ALONE,
SINCE I'VE TROUBLE COMMUNICATING WITH OTHERS.
Still,
mak-es me
very happy
Your attention

it's more than good enough if your smile is just for me
seiji...
slide
Slip

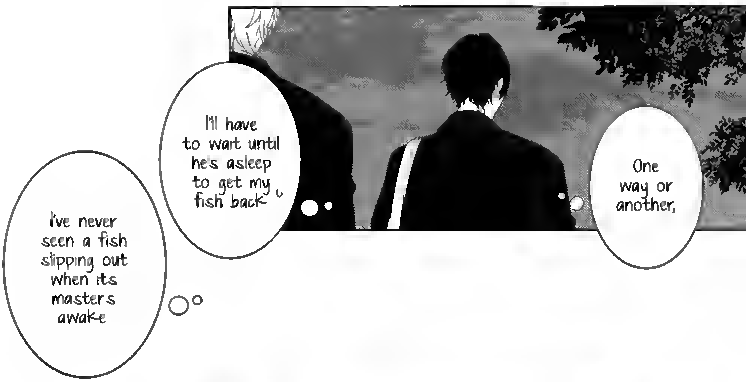
MM...
!
...
HIRO?
...
YE—
YESP

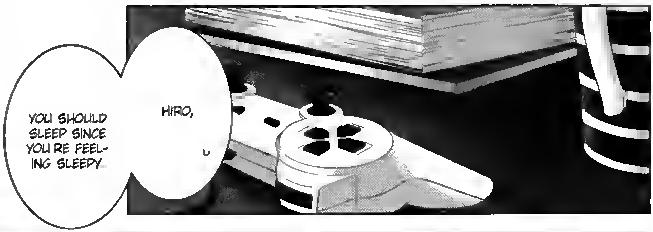




Jerk
SELF?

OH...
SORRY, I GUESS I WAS STILL HALF-ASLEEP
I'VE BEEN WAITING ARE YOU DONE?
YEAH
SEIJI?
HMM?
CAN YOU STAY OVER TONIGHT?
YOU SURE IT'S OKAY?
I JUST BOUGHT A NEW GAME, ACTUALLY...


One way or another,
I'll have to wait until he's asleep to get my fish back
I've never seen a fish slipping out when its masters awake


HIRO,
YOU SHOULD SLEEP SINCE YOU'RE FEELING SLEEPY

I ALWAYS FALL ASLEEP AFTER ONE O'CLOCK SO I'LL BE FINE
...

!!
Yo!!

I can't fall asleep before he does
WHAT ABOUT YOU? AREN'T YOU GONNA SLEEP?

HIRO, IT'S YOUR TURN NOW—
thud
!
Zzz
WHY DON'T YOU MAKE THIS EASY AND GO TO SLEEP BEFORE ME?

sigh
touch
in the end,
I fell asleep before him
Ah
Three days later
Two days later
The next day
I've had a few more chances after that night, though

What should I do?
Nothing works
It won't come out.
wehhle
Strange, I've been feeling
rather lethargic lately.
wehhle
HIRO?!
CLATTER
WELL THEN,
I'M OFF NOW

I'LL BE IN THE STAFF ROOM IF YOU NEED ANY-THING
The infirmary?
!
YOU'RE AWAKE!
SEIJI?
HOW DO YOU FEEL?
DO YOU HAVE A HEADACHE?

I'M FINE.
sip
PLEASE,
DON'T MAKE ME WORRY SO MUCH
OH

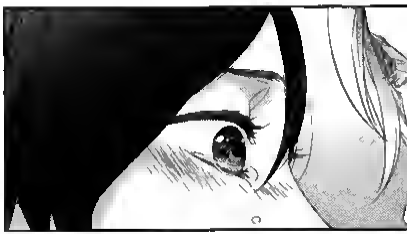
...
AH!
A FISH?
I KNOW THIS IS A FISH, BUT SOMEHOW —
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT THEM, EITHER
THEY'RE ONLY VISIBLE TO ME

WHY WAS IT INSIDE ME?
blush
I...
IT SEEMS TO LIKE ME
I DON'T KNOW EITHER.
...
WHEN I SAW YOU SLEEPING IN THE LIBRARY
IT SUD-DENLY—
YOU MEAN THE OTHER DAY?
WHEN I WAS HALF-ASLEEP
AND HELD YOUR HAND?
YEAH

NO WONDER YOU SEEMED OUT OF IT WHEN I STAYED OVER THE OTHER NIGHT...
I...
I'M SORRY.
BUT I—
I KNOW
YOU MUST FIND THIS WEIRD
SAY, HIRO?

IT MAKES ME HAPPY THAT
YOUR FISH CHOSE ME
I KNOW YOU PREFER BEING ALONE
BUT YOU'RE ALWAYS THERE FOR ME WITHOUT COMPLAIN
IT MAKES ME HAPPY
I'M TRULY HAPPY
DO YOU

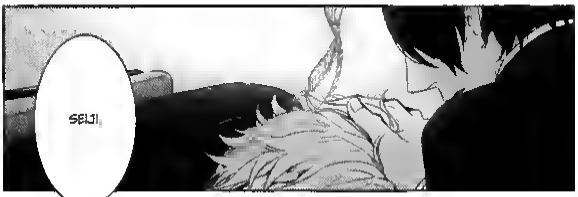
KNOW WHY?
!
SHP



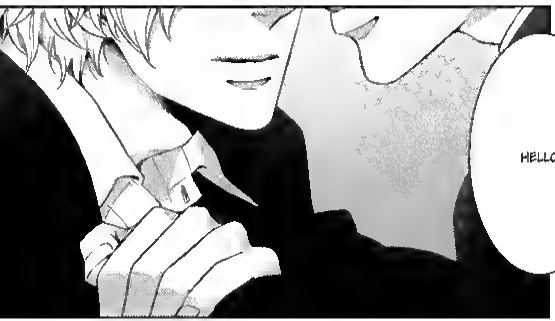
The secret
that once
made me
so cold

is now
warmed by
his touch

HEY,
SEIJI?
slip
TIME TO
HEAD BACK.



Even now,



the secret still lingers between this palm

and the small crevices of this world

end

40nt
adhsdiagram

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 05
Aoi Aki

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KNOCK KNOCK
SEIJI?
HEY,
I JUST GOT BACK FROM WORK AND I WANTED TO SEE YOU
KATA
YOU GOT OFF PRETTY LATE.
WELL, IT'S THE END OF THE FISCAL YEAR
IT'S TYPICALLY LIKE THIS EVERYWHERE ELSE TOO

HOW'S YOUR WRITING COMING ALONG?
YOU LOOK PALE
I'M HAVING A WRITER'S BLOCK RIGHT NOW
WELL THEN
YOU SHOULD DO SOMETHING ELSE FOR A CHANGE.
LET'S TAKE A STROLL
ONLY FOR AN HOUR OR SO.
OKAY

end

160nt

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 06
Ao1 Ak1

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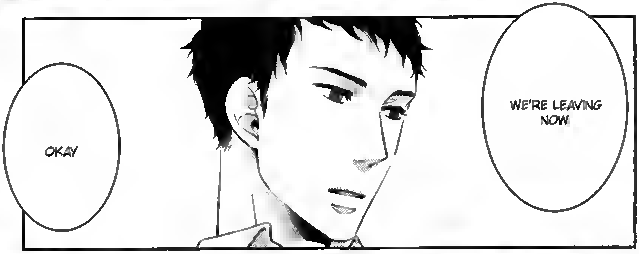
We received news of my grandfather's death in the morning
RRING
RRING
MOM, HAVE YOU SEEN MY SUIT?
IT'S IN THE CLOSET ON THE SECOND FLOOR. DON'T FORGET TO TAKE YOUR FATHER'S, TOO
Before reality could even sink in,
we had to pack our things and go back to the countryside in a haste

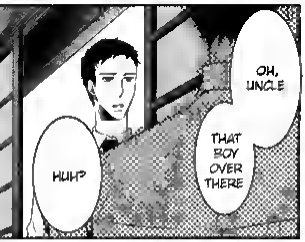
August,
End of Summer

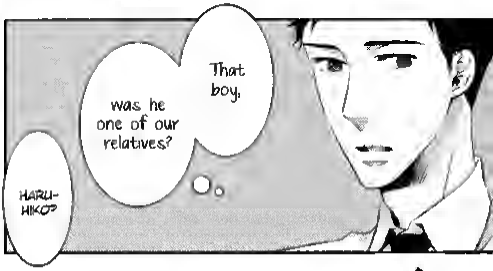
My grandfather loved me very much ever since I was a child, but for the past few years I've only visited him two or three times per year

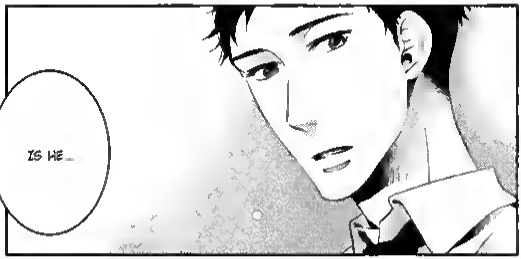


The last time I saw him was half a year ago

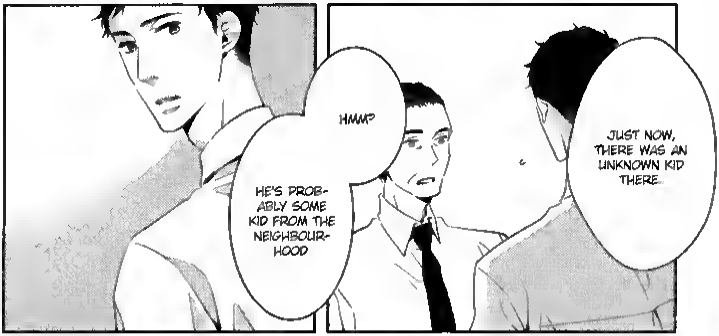
GOROU-SAN'S AT PEACE NOW HE HAD BEEN STRUGGLING ALL BY HIM-SELF
EVER SINCE HATSUE PASSED AWAY
YES YOU'RE RIGHT
BUT WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?
I CAN'T BEAR TO LET THE HOUSE GO
BUT IT'S RATHER HARD TO TAKE CARE OF SINCE IT'S IN SUCH A REMOTE AREA


OH, UNCLE
THAT BOY OVER THERE
HUH?


That boy,
was he one of our relatives?
HARU-HIKO?


IS HE...

HUH?


HMM?
HE'S PROBABLY SOME KID FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD
JUST NOW, THERE WAS AN UNKNOWN KID THERE...

OH
That boy again

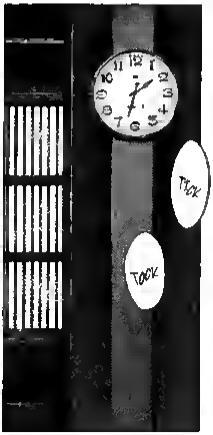
...
ALRIGHT THEN.
WE'LL LEAVE THIS PLACE IN YOUR CARE.
...

NO PROBLEM.
I CAN FOCUS ON MY ASSIGNMENT HERE ANYWAY

buzz
buzz

This place hasn't changed at all.

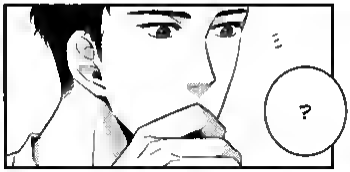
buzz
buzz


TICK
TOCK

There are some terribly made ones left here
Grandpa was pretty fond of spicy food, so what's with these sugar candies?
Probably gave them to the neighbourhood kids who came over to play

!

SNAP


?

OH.

W-WAIT!
!
THOSE FLOWERS,
YOU BROUGHT THEM FOR MY GRANDFATHER, DIDN'T YOU?

nod
...
I'M SURE HE'LL BE HAPPY TO RECEIVE THEM.
THANK YOU.
twitch
THIS ORIGAMI IS IT YOURS?

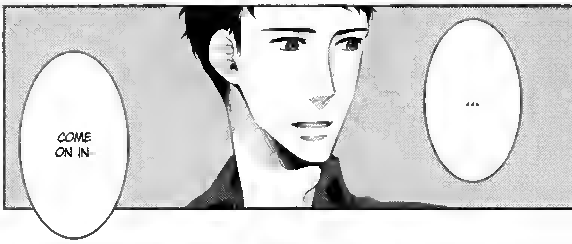
HE TAUGHT ME HOW TO FOLD ONE WHEN I WAS A KID TOO
YEAH
YOU ARE?
GOROU? OH, YEAH.
I'M HIS GRANDSON, HARUHIKO
YOU'RE GOROU'S GRAND-SON?
KOU.

FEEL FREE TO COME BY ANY TIME YOU WANT.

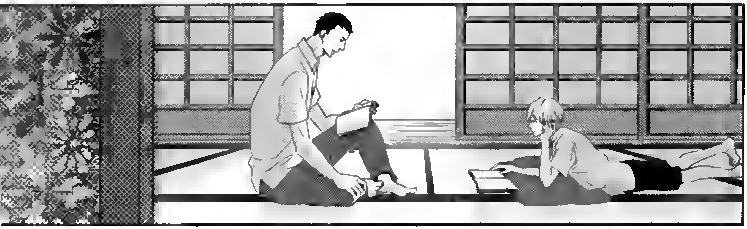
Thank you
Ma'am here

RATTLE

Ever since then, Kou started visiting every day of the week

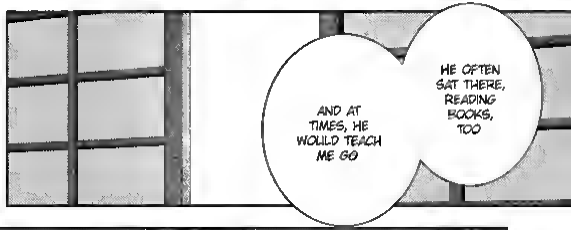


He would bring wild flowers, fruits and mushrooms from the mountain as offerings to my grandfather



OH YEAH?

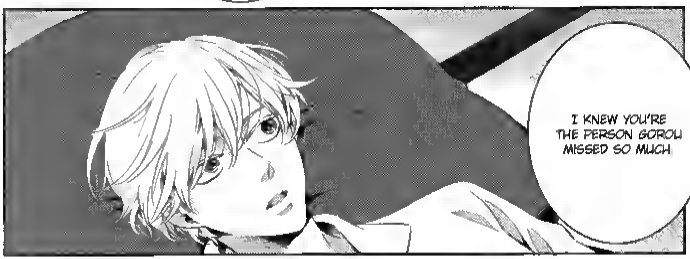
HARUHIKO, YOU HAVE A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE TO GOROU

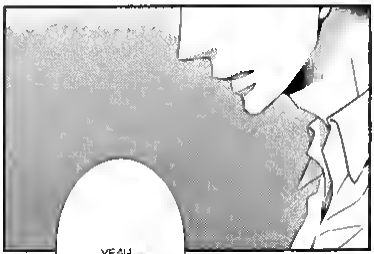

AND AT TIMES, HE WOULD TEACH ME GO
HE OFTEN SAT THERE, READING BOOKS, TOO

HE ALSO TOLD ME STORIES ABOUT YOU

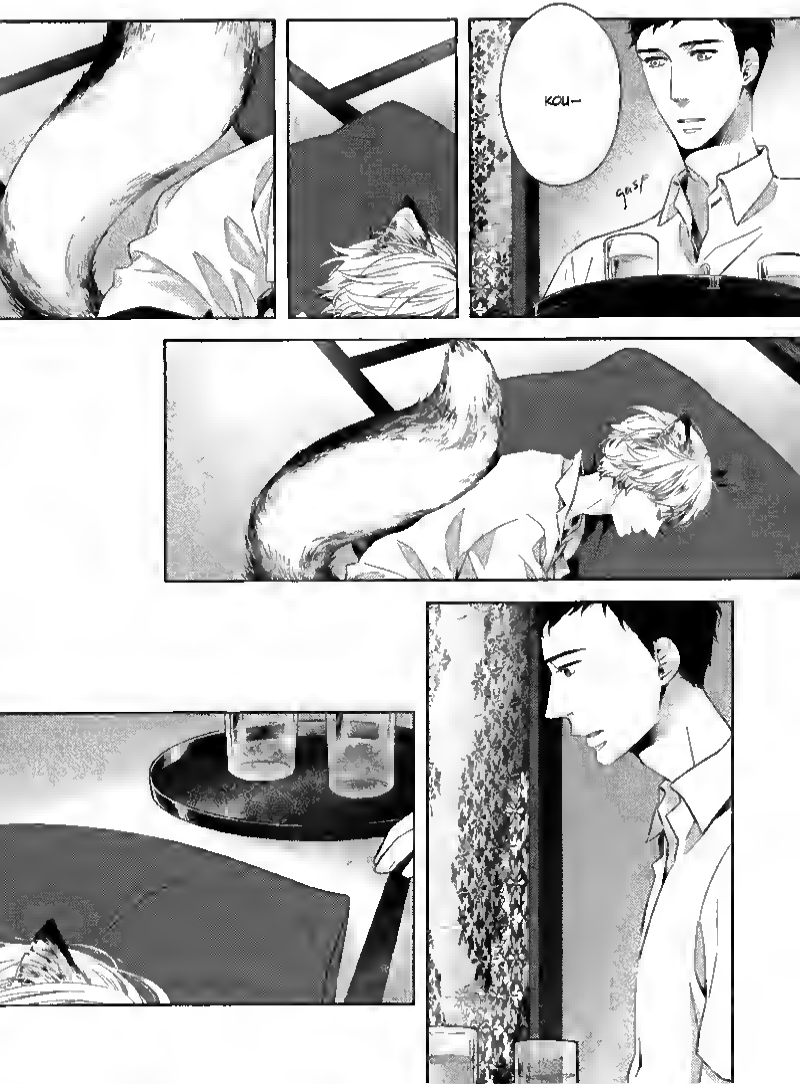
THAT YOU WERE STUDYING IN A UNIVERSITY FAR AWAY
OR THAT HE HAD GOTTEN A PHONECALL FROM YOU THE DAY BEFORE

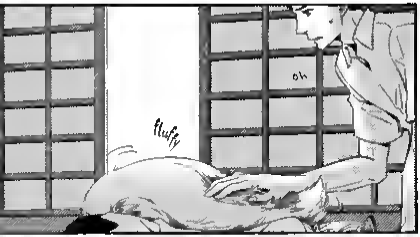
I KNEW WHO YOU WERE THE INSTANT WE MET...
THAT'S WHY


I KNEW YOU'RE THE PERSON GOROU MISSED SO MUCH

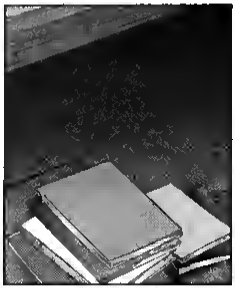

YEAH...

IF ONLY YOU MANAGED TO SEE HIM ONE LAST TIME...

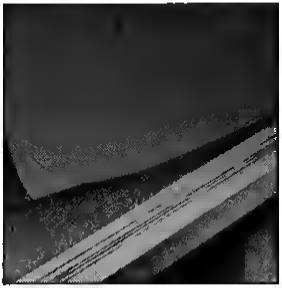

KOU—
gasp



Ensnarled by the abnormality of that bizarre event,



strangely, I find myself accepting its oddities.



Ush.

WIND'S REALLY STRONG, ISN'T IT?
HELLO.

OH, HELLO!

IT'S PARTICULARLY STRONG TODAY
BEST TO PREPARE THE STORM SHUTTERS NOW, I'D SAY

Come to think of it,
Kou's living in the mountain, isn't he?

THUD

GRRR
GRRR
ガサガサ
ガサガサ
...
If Im not mistak-en,
theres a stairway stone-path starting from the back door of the house,
that leads to the shrine

Pant
Did he always
walk down this path to see grandpa?
Collecting the things he treasures from the mountain,
and bringing them to grandpa as gifts.

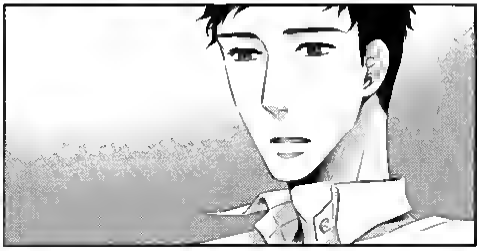
KOU.
...

YOU'RE KOU, AREN'T YOU?
YOU'RE COVERED IN MUD.
WERE YOU LOOKING FOR FLOWERS AS OFFERINGS IN THIS STORMY WEATHER?
OH MY.
YOU GOT CAUGHT IN A BOAR TRAP.

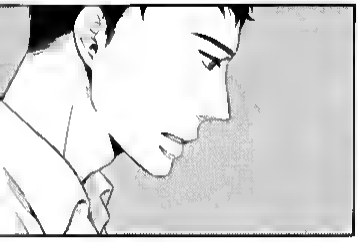
TRY NOT TO GET INJURED AGAIN, OKAY?
I'VE ALWAYS BEEN ALONE
THAT I WANTED TO REPAY HIM SOMEHOW.
I WAS SO HAPPY
AS MANY AS I COULD, I GATHERED ALL THE THINGS I FAVORED
I DECEIVED YOU BY TRANSFORMING INTO A HUMAN

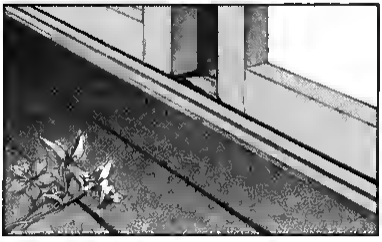
TO OFFER THEM TO HIM. THAT WAS THE LEAST I COULD DO...
DONE ALL THE THINGS I COULD NEVER DO.
BECAUSE OF YOU.
MY GRANDFATHER WASN'T ALONE.
THANK YOU.

When the 49 days memorial service ended, I had to return to the university at once



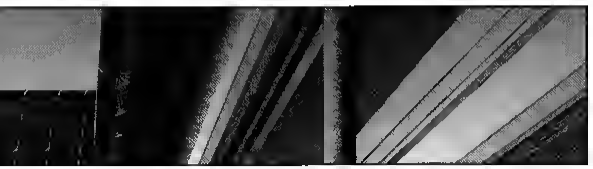
After that night, Kou never appeared before me again





BUT I'LL SURELY COME BACK TO THIS HOUSE AGAIN.
I HAVE TO GO BACK TOMORROW
KOU.
GRANDPA ISN'T AROUND ANYMORE
BUT I HOPE NEXT TIME YOU'D COME TO SEE ME
...
buzz
buzz

buzz
buzz



KOU?

Pikkk

!!

KOU...
...
HUMANS TEND TO BE AFRAID OF BEINGS THAT ARE DIFFERENT FROM THEM.
I WAS CAREFULL NOT TO LET GOROU FIND OUT ABOUT MY IDENTITY.
EVENTUALLY, YOU TOO, WILL FIND ME REVOLTING.

I WON'T
I'VE TOLD YOU THAT I'M GRATEFUL TO YOU, HAVEN'T I?
YOU HAD ALWAYS BEEN BY MY GRAND-FATHER'S SIDE
AND NOW, I WANT YOU TO BE BY MY SIDE

WHEN AUTUMN COMES,
I'LL RETURN TO THIS PLACE.
CAN I LOOK FOR YOU THEN?
...
SURE.
The train is now departing
Please watch your steps.

IT'S A SUN SHOWER!
HEY, LOOK
end

60
nt

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 07
Ao1 Aki

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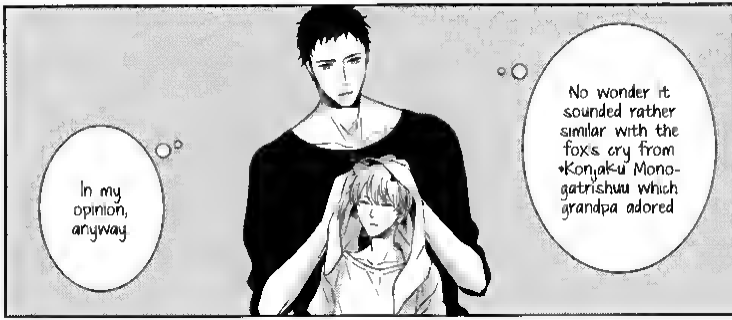
In my opinion, anyway
No wonder it sounded rather similar with the fox's cry from *Konjaku Monogatrishuu which grandpa adored

*T/N KONJAKU MONOGATARISHUU — ANTHOLOGY OF TALES FROM THE PAST. A JAPANESE COLLECTION OF OVER A THOUSAND TALES WRITTEN DURING THE LATE HEIAN PERIOD

Grandpa had surely
I'M TURNING OFF THE LIGHT.
realized his secret.
SWEET DREAMS, KOU.

end

30nt

There were various trials and errors while
creating my first official book release
Surely there were parts that were rather
unsightly, but if the readers finds the book
interesting and pleasing, that'll bring me much joy
Thank you so much for purchasing the book

aeraki

Tsumasaki ni Kourozu
Chapter 08
Ao1 Ak1

HertZ
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